

Appendix D

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BAM

GO CONG, June 21, 1966

TO: Frank G. Wisner
Office of the Deputy Ambassador

THRU: Harry Jackson
USAID Regional Director
IV Corps

FROM: Dao Van HOA
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USAID GO CONG

SUBJECT: Land Reform

After reading carefully the 9 questions in the Land Reform Questionnaire I received from you thru Mr. Harry Jackson, USAID Regional Director, IV Corps, I have the conviction that these questions posed are based on an obsolete picture of land ownership in rural area of VN. If these questions were posed in 1956 they would have made sense, but since then there have been so many changes that the picture of the farmer's life nowadays is completely different. No answer can be appropriate to Question 1, because no sort of farmers like the ones in Question 1 exist in Go Cong rural scene now. It is possible that the same situation exists in many other provinces. I can give answers to the remaining 8 questions but I think my answers may misinterpret the existing problem of Land Reform and shall become wrong guidance for people who want to use them as information for a study to find a solution for our existing Land Reform problem. Due to the war the situation of farmers in rural areas now is not the same of the one in 1956 or 1958. So if a solution is required for the today Land Reform it should be found from the study of what is going on in rural area and of the way how farmers are now earning their living. So instead of giving answer to each of the questions in this Land Reform questionnaire I would like to describe a picture of what has been going on in rural area life since 1962 when President Diem's Land Reform Program was considered as completely failed.

VC activities had started since 1960 but they had not controlled the majority of rural areas' people until the fall of President Ngo Dinh Diem. Having taken advantages of the political crisis when ARVN were held in cities, VC attacked local forces, overran many posts and within a few days they controlled almost all the rural area of Go Cong province except the capital chief town

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and Hoa Dong district town.

For a few month near the end of 1963 VC had been the real boss of rural areas in Go Cong province. Many other provinces had been in the same situation. During this period VC had completed their land reform. They had taken all land in villages and hamlets and had redistributed the land to people who really cultivate the land and live with it. A farmer family may cultivate more or less land depending on the number of mouths it has to feed and also depending on whether the family has members in VC ranks. A family of 5 members may cultivate $1\frac{1}{2}$ hectares and if it has any member in VC Forces it is authorized to cultivate 3 hectares. They, of course, have to pay tax to VC. $1\frac{1}{2}$ hectares usually cannot be sufficient for a farmer family to earn a decent living when it has to ^{pay} heavy tax. So the family must live on other resources. They may raise ducks, chicks, pigs or work as odd job laborers or as small businessman when they are not busy in their rice paddy field.

The golden time of the landlords has finished. The picture of landowners, from the ones who own more than 5 hectares to the ones who own more than 100 hectares or more are completely out of the rural scene now. Due to VC atrocities, due to fear of VC policy they have fled away to cities. They gave up their land property, because their safety is more important. Anyway they have never cultivated their land and to earn a living they do not need their land. They are civil servants, lawyers, engineers, professors, doctors, businessmen etc... So who are staying in villages and hamlets now? They are people who cannot afford to have a living in cities. They only know how to earn a living by working in the field, by their hard labor they can get food from the mother Earth.

Then clear-and-hold operations have ^{been} launched by GVN. Gradually many hamlets and villages are reoccupied by GVN troops, and the situation has become more complicated. The old landowners in cities and Saigon again feel that they possibly have opportunity to recuperate their land once taken by VC when security is restored by GVN forces. But the landowners have never dared to come back to their villages to collect land rent, even the place is considered as pacified. Usually they send one of their acquaintances or relatives to ask for. In many cases, the tenant farmers usually give some pretexts such as "VC taxes are so much this year that we do not have any more rice to pay rent, or the crop lost this year because of insect damage etc.." and refuse to pay rent.

It is known that GVN cannot control the rural area, or pacify the hamlets without the collaboration of the people who live in hamlets. And the hamlet people will never loyally collaborate with GVN when they see that behind the GVN troops will arrive a bunch of landowners asking them to pay the unpaid land rent of many years. Without the collaboration of these farmer families who are now living in hamlet the local government cannot organize PF units for the defense of the hamlet. So far every youth from the farmer families in newly pacified hamlet was recruited into

PF units or RF units of Go Cong province, and their morale is high. Most of the people who live in newly pacified hamlets has given full support to the local Government. The reason why Go Cong province has gained such good success can be explained by the fact that Province Chief has given order to all his subordinates "Nobody is authorized to assist landowners to collect land rent or to collect land rent for landowners". To hamlet people he has made clear "GVN as well as ARVN, RF and PF are not fighting VC for landowners to recuperate their land or to collect taxes from you, poor farmers, but we are fighting for your welfare and happiness, we are fighting VC to help you improve your life, to lift up your standard of living, we are fighting for the good of our people." He also said to poor farmers "You are the most suffered in our nation now and I do not say that you have to pay land rent to landowner, a land reform should be implemented in a fair and reasonable way and the Gov. is planning to have land reform soon. You are people who can make land produce food stuff, you should have at least a small piece of land to cultivate to have enough income to raise a family. Your sons are now PFs who are representing GVN to defense your hamlets, Village committees and hamlets committees are yours, so the Government now is yours and you can defense your right and interest. You must remember that I do not say you have to pay land rent to landowners. In other words Province Chief has given his tacit agreement with the farmers' present status. So even in those areas having pacified again, the situation of landownership in villages after VC land reform, has remained the same with another advantage for farmers - the latter still do not have to pay land rent nor VC taxes. The farmers who live in GVN controlled areas in Go Cong have only to pay 85\$ per cultivated hectare (for rural development program as stated by Province Chief) in VC controlled areas they have to pay 850\$ per hectare plus 1 kg of rice each week a family has to give to VC as assistance to VC Armed Forces.

How happy are the tenant farmers in GVN recontrolled areas now. For the time being there are no tenant grievances of any kind except to earn a living they have to stay in village and hamlet and most of them in PF units to fight VC and sometimes become fatal victims of the war. As to landowners, they only own papers certifying their ownership of their land with the hope that when peace is restored they can recuperate their land property again.

Go Cong Province Chief is studying now a plan for land reform in Go Cong province. According to him, land reform should be performed as follows:

- 1.- To persuade landowners to give up their land, by using the following saying "If VC win the war you, landowners, will loose your land, your life will be endangered, you will die or live with shame throughout your life hated by your compatriots. To give up your landownership and offer your land to GVN land reform program so that your land will be given to poor people in a fair, just and reasonable program. Such benefic acts from you will encourage our farmers to fight against VC and your enemy will be destroyed, you win the love of your compatriots and your life can be proud and safe. Moreover time has proved that you don't need your land to make your living and land is only needed by people who can make it produce, without their hand your land will be of no value. You also must remember that if our farmers don't fight VC then VC will win this war then you will loose your land anyway, because most of our soldiers now ARVN, RF or PF are coming from farmers families. So do not hesitate to give your not-needed land to your poor compatriots. How wise you are in this chivalrous acts.

2.- Land in the rural area should be given to people who make it produce food stuff, and best pieces of land should be given to people who are sacrificing themselves the most for the welfare of the people - to soldiers for example -. People such as PF, RF, ARVN and whoever are fighting VC should have best piece of land and also assistance from other people who live under their protection.

When asked whether he think the above practice is unfair to landowners, Col. Xuan, Province Chief said: "In this struggle against VC everybody has to sacrifice something. Even they loose their land, landowners still have a much happier life in cities than any farmer can have. By giving up ownership, landowners would only contribute a very small part in this struggle. They cannot defeat the VC enemy by themselves to get their land back from VC anyway. The people of VN (majority of them are farmers) fight VC for the good of the nation and do not fight for the unjust right and interest of a small group of people and the farmers do not want to fight VC and then to be farm slaves again. Province Chief also said that after explanation has been made clear to landowners, most of them still regret their land but have agreed with him. Some of the advanced landowners even said "Landowners should give up their land to people who cultivate it" Col's idea should be realized years ago by GVN. This program has been my dream for years and I feel sorry that so far my dream has not come true, and I do not know why GVN is so slow in this life-and-death important program. The landowner who expressed the above idea is Mr. CANG Chief of Elementary Education of Go Cong Province.

How do you think Sir ?

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